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24 July 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: George A. Carver, Jr.

SUBJECT : Your Memo for the DCI on US
Courses of Action in Indochina
dated 4 July 1970

I have so many objections to your memo, George, that I find it necessary to set them down in some detail. These are my comments, not OCI's.

I once told you that one of the complaints among Vietnicks in OCI is that although we have ample publications in which to air our views, you have the only agency voice of any significance to the Director and to other high level government figures on Vietnamese affairs. My answer to this complaint is that any would-be petitioner should set down his views and then try to convince you that he has something to say which deserves being passed upwards. I am so out of tune with what you wrote in your memorandum, however, that my belief in the efficacy of such a procedure is shaken.

First, the DCI's covering memo to Kissinger says that "we have taken the occasion to review where we stand" etc. Your covering note to the Director says you have been consulting colleagues about the subject matter. I recognize that your effort was intended as one man's view of the situation, but these comments suggest that the rest of us in the agency are generally on board with your findings, or at least not violently opposed to them. For whatever it may be worth, I think you are far off the mark.

I appreciate the value of high personalized papers, especially when they are as provocative as this one, and I applaud the idea of shipping them downtown where they must be sick of overcoordinated NSSMs and the like. But especially so soon after a controversial NIE on Hanoi's intentions has been squelched, I think you do a disservice to us all, not to mention the best interests of the United States, to send a paper like this to the White House that even remotely suggests it reflects a consensus. I recognize, of course, that if the DCI blesses a paper, it is the agency's view. That is as it should be. But if you and the Director see any utility in keeping the rest of us around, I suggest you give us a chance to be heard before you fire off such broadsides.

The following comments are keyed to the paragraphs in your text dated 4 July 1970:

1. Some very healthy and pertinent thoughts about the nonsense that appeared in NSSMs 94 & 95, in particular, not to mention at least a half dozen policy papers of 1969.

3a. I disagree strongly with the notion that Hanoi is bent on a party controlled government in South Vietnam in short order. This agency's reporting, as well as a long record of other statements, suggests that the Communist goal of reunification is one that can be put off for years; certainly they do not anticipate any outcome to this war that would make reunification possible in a matter of months.

3b. Overstates Hanoi's objectives in Laos and Cambodia. Hegemony sure; suzerainty perhaps; but certainly not a "controlled, disciplined satellite of the Lao Dong" in any foreseeable timeframe. If Hanoi already had South Vietnam in the bag, some kind of Sihanouk or Souvanna would be fully satisfactory to Hanoi in Cambodia and Laos for a long time.

4. Your introductory note says to me that US objectives are poorly defined and hence difficult to articulate or to make palatable to people who believe that some of our basic notions about Indochina were incorrect. I agree, but when you get to specifics, I part company with you. Because you infer our objectives from US activities and statements during the past 15 years, I'll do the same. Simply put, our real objective, if not our stated one, is to prevent the Communists from taking over South Vietnam, and Laos and Cambodia as well. In the latter cases, the objective flows largely from the commitment in Vietnam. What else is there?

4a. Stability certainly is a desirable condition for Indochina from the US point of view, but does it head the list of our objectives? Certainly not.

4b. This is a nod to the concept of self-determination, which successive administrations have used to cloak anti-Communist policies, but is it really our objective? I recognize the utility of viable governments (if only as a factor in stability). But why should we care if

a government in Indochina does or does not reflect some ill-defined balance of political forces; this is difficult enough for us to achieve in the United States, much less in an area where the concept is totally out of keeping with tradition. I see no reason why we should accept administration rhetoric as a definition of a real US objective, when in fact it clearly is not.

4c. This comes close to defining our real anti-Communist objective.

4d. At this point in time, I for one would put the objective of disengagement at the top of the list, above the anti-Communist one, but that is a matter for the President to decide in the light of our national interests as a whole. I would say that (c) & (d) state our current objectives, that they are not fully compatible, and that only the policy maker can decide which one comes first. Almost everything else flows from that decision as you note later.

5b. This attempt to separate strategy from objectives is a bit of fancy footwork that smacks of sophistry. Our troubles derive directly from Hanoi's objectives and from our determination to thwart those objectives. The two are incompatible, as all of us have said many times before. If you are trying to say that if the Communists would play by our rules we would win -- OK. But doesn't that make it quite unlikely that they will play by our rules no matter what we do?

5c. I disagree with this one for essentially the same reason as above. The achievement of US objectives, as I infer them from the record, requires that we block the achievement of Hanoi's objectives.

5d. Here you forthrightly rule out any useful role for negotiations. This probably is true if one defines out objective as an anti-Communist Vietnam, as I have inferred from our past policies. But if our objectives are put in your terms of self-determination, stability, and similar administration rhetoric, then I submit that the only way to achieve them is to negotiate because they require fundamental compromise on both sides. Your characterization of Hanoi's cynical view of negotiations, though probably accurate, applies to the diplomacy of the United States, the Soviet Union, or the Mafia. But it is irrelevant because every state is interested in success and will try to use negotiations to serve that end.

5e. The same is true of Hanoi's view of agreements derived from negotiations. No state abides for long by agreements that conflict with its national interests. They break them, modify them, or ignore them, and of course claim otherwise. The point to be made here is that any negotiated agreement must serve the interests of the parties involved better than not having such an agreement or it will be broken.

5f. Hanoi's basic strategy is not armed struggle. Hanoi's basic strategy is to achieve political power in South Vietnam through whatever tactics will do the job. One can argue that Hanoi's policies for armed struggle have been modified greatly in the past two years because cost-effectiveness calculations showed that earlier efforts were not worth the price.

6. I have no basic problems with your profit and loss sheet for Hanoi in the past two years, but I think you emphasize the short-term debits and exclude the long-term credits.

7. Instead of what Hanoi "intends" to do, I'd say that this is what Hanoi has done, regardless of the "bluff and bravado" in its actions. The impression conveyed here is that Hanoi is really on the ropes and is only managing to hold on by a hope that the US will knuckle under to domestic pressures against the war. Appearances aside, I think we agree that Hanoi really believes its staying power is greater than that of the US.

8. I don't think I need to point out the other half of your portrait of Hanoi's attitude toward the 1954-56 period. (They not only failed with a policy based largely on political struggle, they believe they were screwed by both the US and their allies). Your final sentence, that Hanoi "has stonewalled since the Paris talks first opened in May 1968" is a subject for an

entire memo. It perpetuates the myth, now enshrined in the collected works of the Vice President, that the US gave away the crown jewels (the bombing of North Vietnam) in a naive attempt to get the Communists to negotiate. I won't go into details, but I happen to subscribe to the Vance-Harriman thesis (I know the Governor's around the bend now) that we had something going in the fall of 1968 that skilled diplomacy could have nurtured into arrangements that might have curbed the killing, at least temporarily, while we explored the possibilities of negotiation. Let me assert vigorously that I believe Hanoi has occasionally done more than stonewall in Paris.

10. No country wants to fight a war indefinitely. Your next sentence, that Hanoi calculates it has the wherewithal to carry on longer than the US is a telling one, however. It is worth recalling as you proceed.

11. I had thought from your earlier comments to me that this "time vs. objectives" argument was to be the main thrust of your paper. Here you state the proposition, but you stack the deck in the ensuing discussion.

12. Scenario A is simply a formula for a sellout in Vietnam. It's a straw man, a non-starter in bureaucratese, or perhaps a throwaway option in the lingo of this administration. Why, for example, should the time frame be "measure in months."

12b. I think it is specious to argue that selling a home under a time deadline and negotiating in Vietnam in our current situation are comparable.

The constraints on the United States are real, but if we can even mull over Option B, then we are not under the kind of pressure implied in "The Price" in Option A.

12b (1). By issuing the ten points and by offering to talk about them privately with the US, Hanoi has expressed a willingness to discuss all subjects connected with the war. (See private conversations of May, July and August 1969). The problem is that we refused to discuss anything except mutual withdrawal of forces. No one can disprove your contention that we "probably" would have to talk politics with PRG types without the GVN, because this is unknowable without further exploration of Hanoi's attitude in private. I dispute your assertion on the basis of considerable study of the record, but who's to know? The fact is that Hanoi offered repeatedly to discuss all issues privately with us in 1969 and we refused. End of negotiations.

12b (2). You certainly are correct that we don't know the price until we talk to the seller, but you are far too hard in excluding the GVN if I read our evidence correctly. Almost everyone who has followed the subject closely during the past few years is convinced there is a great deal of flab in Hanoi's position on the GVN.

12e. This is the conventional (and incorrect) description of the fight-talk tactics we attribute to the Communists. (i.e., they pour it on when they are about to negotiate.) I know I run up against a great deal of collective wisdom, but shouldn't we take account of the only experience we have in negotiating with Hanoi in recent years and acknowledge, loudly and

candidly, that during the only two or three periods in which they (and we) negotiated seriously (June-July 1968, Oct-Nov 1968, and the summer of 1969), their military activity was reduced drastically while we generally poured on the coals? Doesn't this have some lessons for us that we should not ignore even if Harriman constantly distorts the point for political and perhaps personal purposes? I subscribe to your general suggestions for our military posture under Scenario A as set forth in paras. 12e (1)-(4).

12g. You cannot argue that any variant of Scenario A probably would put "irreparable" strains on our relations with the GVN. There are too many variants. Interestingly, I find your suggestion of the line we should take toward the GVN and toward the world at large quite persuasive. Why, indeed, are we not able to turn our very powerful position in South Vietnam into faster disengagement and/or a strong bargaining hand with Hanoi? If it all collapses so easily, then it clearly is not as strong and stable as some would like to think it is today, You can't have it both ways.

I think your "In sum" for Scenario A is far, far too simple. It may be accurate over the longer term, but hardly plausible in the short run. In effect, you throw away South Vietnam (and this scenario) in a single sentence. By implication, this conclusion contains a very dismal assessment of the present allied situation in South Vietnam.

13. Scenario B clearly is your choice from the two options. I disagree, of course, with the fuzzy statement of our objectives. Our objective under this scenario is not just a non-Communist South Vietnam, but an anti-Communist

South Vietnam as the mainstay of an anti-Communist portion of Indochina. Why not say so?

13a (2). Isn't it just possible that the alteration that might occur in Hanoi's present "strategy" would bring about an increase rather than a decrease in armed struggle? We all agree that Hanoi has this option. Haven't you already said that Hanoi is convinced it has more staying power than the US? You, in effect, give the brief for the current Administration's line that Vietnamization will produce negotiations. (Not quite, I know, but in effect.) I still ask why not escalation or more de-escalation in response to Vietnamization instead of disengagement through negotiations?

13b. Where is the paradox in the point that because the US wants out, the North Vietnamese are encouraged to hang in? I have no doubt that "a credible public stance by the US" that we are prepared to stay in the game indefinitely in order to maintain a non-Communist government would give Hanoi something to ponder, but in 1970 is this really a credible stance? Or more to the point, how can we make it credible when Hanoi and many other observers do not think it is?

13c. This is a very shallow rendition of Hanoi's major vulnerabilities. Hanoi certainly has major vulnerabilities, but in my view the main ones involved weaknesses in the Communist position in South Vietnam, which can only be exploited successfully by the South Vietnamese (and therein lie some of our vulnerabilities). Your discussion of the lack of Communist success is true enough, but this is not a "major vulnerability" if the Communists are playing for time and not banking on major successes for the

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time being. The manpower argument smacks of Joe Alsop. I recognize the manpower problem, so does Hanoi, but in mid-1970 do we in CIA really want to argue that this is a basic constraint on Hanoi's willingness to continue the struggle? A constraint on its options, of course, but not on its ability to play for time and the long haul. How many times have we collectively reached the opposite conclusion from yours? Your third major vulnerability, the loss of Sihanoukville, is only valid if we can stop the Communists from making up the loss. In that sense, why not say that North Vietnam's major vulnerability is that it is a small state that we could crush completely if we would only grasp the opportunity?

13d. I think you belabor the point of a single struggle. Bureaucratically we may not handle Indochina as one problem, but in terms of objectives I think we do. Our number one objective is to keep the Communists from taking South Vietnam, just as their number one is to take it. Are you suggesting that we should adopt the objectives you attribute to Hanoi--control of all of Indochina?

13e (1). What kind of South Vietnamese ground action in southern Laos? How are we going to get Souvanna to buy that?

13e (2). Why do we again want to pay the price of pushing the Communists back across the PDJ, when we know they'll only come back again?

13f (1). Souvanna's avowed policy is "neutrality." How can that be continued if South Vietnamese ground forces are going to be used in southern Laos?

13g. Why do we want these governments linked in a formal alliance? None of them want

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this. I don't believe what this paragraph suggests is possible, but it has the virtue of being a very forthright suggestion of trying to divide Indochina cleanly into Communist and anti-Communist portions.

13h. This would be the proper diplomacy to accompany an uncompromising anti-Communist stance; talk about self-determination and call for a cease-fire, but keep the heat on and don't negotiate.

13i. To whom would these messages be addressed? The Lao Dong Party, which we all agree will not abandon its objectives; or to the people of North Vietnam?

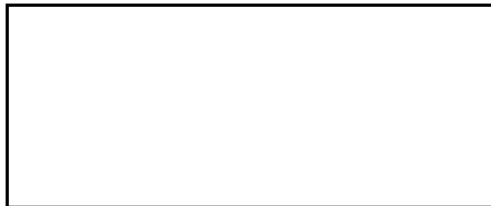
13j (1). What would we consider a "serious negotiating stance" on the part of the Vietnamese Communists?

13j (2). By arguing that the evolution of a situation as described in (2) would incline Hanoi to move to (1) you are making the argument that successful Vietnamization will lead Hanoi to negotiate. Not only do I disagree, but you may recall that you were unanimously opposed on this point by representatives from DDP, ONE, OER, and OCI when it was made in one draft of NSSM 95.

13k. I would not calculate either the odds or the time frame for the success of Scenario B as you do, but I have to tip my hat to you for having the guts to make such a judgment rather than leaving it as an entirely open-ended proposition.

14-21. An organizational coda is not my bag, but I think there is considerable merit in your idea of consolidating some of

the groups, committees, and panels working on Vietnam under a single head. I think all the problems will remain until there is clear policy direction from the President, however.



MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. George A. Carver, Jr.
SAVA

George:

Here are my comments on your memorandum. They will not go elsewhere, though I may show them to [] and others in the group who read your paper.

I have tried to be candid and fairly complete. As you will note, I disagree with many of your judgments, and I did not like the paper.

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24 July 1970
(DATE)

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